

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 636

Introduced by Assembly Member Frommer

February 19, 2003

An act to add Part 4 (commencing with Section 1000) to Division 1 of the Health and Safety Code, relating to autism.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 636, as introduced, Frommer. Developmental disabilities: autism.

Existing law, the Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act, requires the State Department of Developmental Services to contract with regional centers for the provision of various services and supports to persons with developmental disabilities, including autism.

Existing law requires regional centers to perform initial intake and assessment services for any person believed to have a developmental disability.

Existing law requires the State Department of Developmental Services to develop evaluation and diagnostic procedures for the diagnosis of autism disorder and all other autistic spectrum disorders that may be utilized by clinical staff at regional centers, and to develop a corresponding training program for the staff to be implemented on or before July 1, 2002.

This bill would require the Director of Health Services to establish, within the State Department of Health Services, an Autism Assistance Clearinghouse Office, and to appoint an Advocate for Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders to head the office.

This bill would provide that the duties of the office shall be determined by the director but that those duties would include

developing educational and informational guides for families with autistic children and serving as a clearinghouse of information related to autism.

This bill would also provide that the department shall use existing resources, and seek federal and private funding, to implement the provisions of the bill.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes. State-mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

1 SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the
2 following:

3 (a) Children are being diagnosed with autism spectrum
4 disorders at an alarming and rapidly increasing rate, with these
5 disorders affecting as many as one in 250 children.

6 (b) The State Department of Developmental Services
7 documented a 273 percent increase in the number of autism cases
8 in California alone. This number was later substantiated by a
9 followup study conducted by the M.I.N.D. Institute at the U.C.
10 Davis Medical Center.

11 (c) Numerous studies have established the importance and
12 effectiveness of early intervention treatment for infants diagnosed
13 with an autistic disorder.

14 (d) As the number of children with autism spectrum disorders
15 continues to increase, there is also increased need for assistance in
16 helping families find out what services and support are available
17 for these families.

18 (e) By necessity, families of children with autism spectrum
19 disorders seek treatment, services, and assistance from a wide
20 array of public and private health care, educational, and social
21 services resources.

22 (f) Families would be better able to access early intervention
23 and appropriate treatment or services for autism spectrum
24 disorders if information and assistance regarding existing support
25 services, treatment services, education services, and parent's
26 rights and options were available from a single agency.

27 SEC. 2. Part 4 (commencing with Section 1000) is added to
28 Division 1 of the Health and Safety Code, to read:

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PART 4. ADVOCATE FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN
WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

1000. The director shall establish an Autism Assistance Clearinghouse Office within the department.

1001. The office shall be headed by an Advocate for Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, to be appointed by the director. The advocate shall represent the interests of parents of children with autism spectrum disorders.

1002. The office shall not be a direct provider of services, but shall assist families to secure appropriate services for their children from available resources, including, but not limited to, private health insurance plans, the State Department of Developmental Services, regional centers, the State Department of Education, and local school districts.

1003. The duties of the office shall, consistent with this part, be determined by the director, and shall include, but not be limited to, all of the following:

(a) Developing educational and informational guides for families with autistic children that describe family rights and responsibilities and that inform families on effective ways to exercise their rights to secure services. The guides shall be easy to read and understand, and shall be available in English and other languages. The guides shall be made available to the public by the department, including by making this information accessible on the department's Internet Web site and through public outreach and educational programs.

(b) Rendering advice and assistance to parents of autistic children regarding procedures and rights as they pertain to services for children with autism spectrum disorders.

(c) Serving as a clearinghouse of information related to autism spectrum disorders, including coordinating and working with other government and nongovernment autism and disability assistance programs and ombudsman programs.

1004. The director shall provide for the assignment of personnel to the office. The department may employ or contract with experts when necessary to carry out the functions of the office.

1 1005. (a) This part shall be implemented only through
2 existing resources, along with resources available pursuant to
3 subdivision (b).

4 (b) The department shall seek additional federal and private
5 funding sources for purposes of funding the office.

